

THE HOLDFAST NO. 1418

A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is your life.”
Proverbs 4:13.*

FAITH may be well described as taking hold upon divine instruction. God has condescended to teach us, and it is ours to hear with attention and receive His words. And while we are hearing, faith comes, even that faith which saves the soul. To take “fast hold” is an exhortation which concerns the strength, the reality, the heartiness and the truthfulness of faith, and the more of these the better. If to take hold is good, to take *fast* hold is better. Even a touch of the hem of Christ’s garment causes healing to come to us, but if we want the full riches which are treasured up in Christ, we must not only touch but take hold. And if we would know from day to day the very uttermost of the fullness of His grace, we must take *fast* hold and so maintain a constant and close connection between our souls and the eternal fountain of life. It were well to give such a grip as a man gives to a plank when he seizes hold of it for his very life—that is a fast hold indeed.

We are to take fast hold of instruction and the best of instruction is that which comes from God. The truest wisdom is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus—of that, therefore, we are to take fast hold. The best understanding is obedience to the will of God and a diligent learning of those saving truths which God has set before us in His Word. So that in effect we are exhorted to take hold of Christ Jesus our Lord, the incarnate wisdom in whom dwells all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We are not to let Him go, but to keep Him and hold Him, for He is our life. Does not John in his gospel, tell us that the Word is our light or instruction and at the same time our life? “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” The more we abide in the Lord Jesus and the more firmly we take hold upon Him, the better will it be for us in a thousand ways. I intend at this time to speak as the Holy Spirit shall enable me, upon this fast hold, and I reckon that the subject is one of the most important which can occupy your attention at this particular crisis in the history of the church. Many there are around us, who believe in Christ, but it is with a very trembling faith, and their hold is unsteady. We need to have among us men of tighter grip who really believe what they profess to believe, who know the truth in its living power, and are persuaded of its certainty, so that they cannot by any means be moved from their steadfastness. Among the vacillating crowd we long to see fast-holders who are pillars in the house of our God, whose grasp of divine truth is not that of babies or boys, but of men full grown and vigorous.

We shall handle our subject by speaking, first, upon *the method* by which we may take fast hold. Then upon *the difficulties* which will lie in our way in so doing. Thirdly, upon *the benefits* of such a firm grasp, and lastly, upon *the arguments* for our holding fast mentioned in the text.

I. First, then, THE METHOD of taking fast-hold upon true religion, upon the gospel, upon Christ in fact.

At the outset, my brethren, much must depend upon the *intense decision* which a man feels in his soul with regard to eternal things. If he intends trifling he will trifle, but if he means taking fast hold he will, by God’s grace, do so. Under God, this, in many cases, depends very much upon a man’s individuality and force of character. Some men are naturally thorough and whole-hearted in all things upon which they enter, whether of this world or the next. When they serve the devil they are among his life-guards and they rush to the front in all kinds of iniquity. Among sinners they become the chief, for they have no fear and no hesitancy. They are daredevils, defying both God and man, sinning greedily with both hands. Such men, when converted, often become eminent saints, being just as thorough and resolute in their following after God as they were in the pursuit of evil. They are determined to vindicate His holy cause and spread abroad the knowledge of His love. I must confess an earnest longing that many such may be brought into the church of Christ at this time to brace her up and inspire her with new ener-

gy. Many in our churches appear to have no depth of earth. With joy they receive the word, from the very fact that they are so shallow, but as soon as the sun rises with burning heat, it is discovered that they have no root, for they wither away. Others are truly religious and probably will remain so, but they are not zealous. In fact, they are not intense about anything, but are lukewarm, weak and unstable. These are mere chips in the porridge, neither sour nor sweet. They give forth no flavor, but they take the flavor of that which surrounds them. They are the creatures of circumstances, not helmsmen who avail themselves of stream and tide, but mere driftwood carried along by any and every current which may take hold of them. They have no fullness of manhood about them, they are mere children. They resemble the sapling which can be bent and twisted and not the oak which defies the storm. There are certain persons of this sort who in other matters have purpose enough and strength of mind enough, but when they touch the things of God, they are loose, flimsy, superficial, and half-hearted. You see them earnest enough in hunting after wealth, but they show no such zeal in the pursuit of godliness. The force of their character comes out, in a political debate, in the making of a bargain, in the arrangement of a social gathering, but you never see it in the work of the Lord. The young man comes to the front as a volunteer, or as a member of a club, or in the house of business, but who ever hears of him in Sunday school, the prayer meeting, or the home mission? In the things of God such persons owe any measure of progress which they make to the influence of their fellows, who bear them along as so much dead weight. They themselves never throw enough weight into the matter to add a single half-ounce of spiritual power to the church. Now, all this is mischievous and wrong.

My dear friends, we must all confess that if the religion of Christ is true, it deserves that we should give our whole selves to it. If it is a lie, let it be eradicated from creation. But if it is true, it is a matter concerning which we cannot be neutral or lukewarm, for it demands our soul, our life, our all, and its claim cannot be denied. There must be a determination worked in our souls by the Holy Spirit to be upright and downright in the work of the Lord or else we shall be of little worth.

We come, however, to closer matters of fact when we observe next, that our taking fast hold of the things of God must depend upon *the thoroughness of our conversion*. In this church we try, as far as we can, in receiving church members, to receive none but those who give clear evidence of a change of heart. But this evidence can be imitated so skillfully that the best examination and the most earnest judgment cannot prevent self-deceived persons from making a profession of religion. This we cannot help, but woe to those who willfully deceive. Many exhibit flowers and fruits which never grew in their own gardens. Their experience is borrowed and does not spring from the essential root of the Holy Spirit's work within their souls. This is sad indeed. Our condition before God, is a personal matter, and can never be settled by the judgment of our fellows, for what can others know of the workings of our hearts? Each man must judge himself and examine himself. For whatever a church may attempt in its zeal for purity, it can never take the responsibility from any man of his own sincerity. We do not pretend to give certificates of salvation, and if we did they would be worthless. You must yourselves know the Lord and be really converted or else your profession is a forgery and you are counterfeits. If a man shall in later life, hold fast to the things of God, he must be soundly converted at first. Very much of his later life depends upon the thoroughness of his beginning. There must at the very first be a deep sense of sin, a consciousness of guilt, a holy horror of evil, or he will never make much of a Christian. I do not say that all or even any of those doubts and temptations and Satanic suggestions which some have had to struggle with, are necessary to make a true conversion. But I must confess that I am not at all displeased when I meet with a good deal of battling and struggling in the experience of the newly awakened. It is not pleasant for them, but we hope it will be profitable. Those whose souls are plowed and plowed and plowed again before the seed is sown upon them often yield the best crop. John Bunyan's, "Grace Abounding," very much accounts for John Bunyan's, "Pilgrim's Progress." If it had not been for his terrible conflicts of soul, he might not have known how to hold fast to his confidence when shut up for twelve years in prison. Nor would he have seen visions of the Celestial City, when all around him was as the valley of the shadow of death. I do not wish to see seeking souls distressed by Satan, but I do press for this—that there shall be an end of self-trust, a total destruction of self-righteousness, a complete giving up of all legal and carnal hopes, or else the conversion will be a mere show and he who is the subject of it will be like Ephraim, a silly dove without heart. Unless repentance of sin is real in you, you will never take fast hold of the truth of God.

And there must be, dear friends, a very sincere laying hold upon Christ Jesus. If you have any doubt about the doctrine of atonement, I am not surprised if your religion soon wears into shreds. No, you must without question, accept the substitutionary sacrifice. Your soul must feel that the precious blood is her only hope—that this, and this alone, can make her clean before the living God. You must fly to Christ in desperation and cling to Him as all your salvation and all your desire, there must be no hesitancy here. At the very outset of the Christian life these two things should be very distinct with you—sin which has ruined you and Christ who has saved you. Make a muddle at first and your life will be a tangle. Some tradesmen never carry on their business well. They evidently do not more than half understand it and are mere bunglers. Now, if you come to inquire, you will find that they were never thoroughly grounded in their calling. Either they never served an apprenticeship, or else they were lazy lads and never became masters of their trade. This bad commencement sticks to them all their lives. It is the same with the higher learning. A man may go a long way in the classics, but if he is not grounded in the grammar, he will be everlastingly making mistakes which a sound scholar will soon discover. Every teacher must work hard at the elements if his pupils are to succeed. Whatever you do with the higher forms, do teach that little boy his grammar and ground him in the rudiments or he will be injured for life. To borrow another illustration, we have heard of a bridge which spanned a stream and for some years stood well enough, but by-and-by, through the force of the current, it began to show signs of giving way. When it came to be examined it was soon seen that the builders never went deep enough with the foundations. There is the mischief of thousands of other things besides bridges! We must have good and deep foundations, or otherwise the higher we build, the sooner the fabric will fall. Look at many of the wretched houses in the streets around us; they are the disgrace of the city. You will see settlements and cracks everywhere because of bad foundations and bad materials. The same is true in the characters of many professed Christians, for lack of a good commencement you can see innumerable flaws and cracks, and you wonder that they do not come down in sudden ruin. So indeed they would, but, like those wretched houses, they hold one another up. Many professors only keep upright because they stand in a row and derive support from their associations. I wish we could see more Christian men of the sort who dare to stand alone, like those old family mansions which stand, each one in its own garden, so well built that when we begin to take them down, each brick is found to be solid as granite and the mortar is as hard as a rock. Such buildings and such men become rarer every day, but we must come back to the old style and the sooner the better. Those of you who are yet in the early days of your piety should see to this. See that you are right, sound and thorough, and take fast hold of the truth in the days of your first love, or yours will be but a sickly life in years to come.

This being taken for granted, the next help to a fast hold of Christ is *hearty discipleship*. Brethren, as soon as you are converted, you become the disciples of Jesus. And if you are to become fast-holding Christians you must acknowledge Him to be your Master, Teacher and Lord in all things, and resolve to be good scholars in His school. He will be the best Christian who has Christ for His Master and truly follows Him. Some are disciples of the church, others are disciples of the minister and a third sort, are disciples of their own thoughts. He is the wise man who sits at Jesus' feet and learns of Him, with the resolve to follow His teaching and imitate His example. He who tries to learn of Jesus Himself, taking the very words from our Lord's own lips, binding himself to believe whatever the Lord has taught and to do whatever He has commanded—he, I say, is the stable Christian. Follow Jesus, my brethren, and not the church, for our Lord has never said to His disciples, "Follow your brethren," but He has said, "Follow Me." He has not said, "Abide by the denominational confession," but He has said, "Abide in Me." Nothing must come between our souls and our Lord. What if fidelity to Jesus should sometimes lead us to differ from our brethren? What does it matter so long as we do not differ from our Master? Crochets and quibbles are evil things, but a keenly sensitive conscientiousness is invaluable. Be true disciples of Christ and let His least word be precious to you. Remember that if a man loves Him, he will keep His words. And He has said, "He that shall break one of the least of these My commandments and shall teach men so, the same shall be least in the kingdom of heaven." Shun all compromises and abatements of truth, but be thorough and determined, holding fast your Savior's Words. Follow the Lamb where ever He goes. If such is your resolve, by the grace of God, you will take fast hold of instruction and will never let it go.

It will help you to do this if in the next place, you have a *studious consideration of the Word of God* and meditate much upon the truth which you have received. I am persuaded there is too little studying of

the Scriptures nowadays. Books, magazines, papers and the like, bury the Bible under heaps of rubbish, but he who means to be a man of God to the fullness of his manhood will feed upon the Word of God at first hand. Like the Bereans, he will be of a noble spirit and he will search the Scriptures daily. "I want," says he, "to obtain my creed, not secondhand from others, but directly for myself from the very Word of God itself—the pure well of undefiled gospel." This is a very important point. I have heard often of late, a misused expression—"I do my own thinking." Let us correct it and then adopt it by saying, "I do my own searching of the Word of God." Remember, we are not called to think out a new gospel, as some imagine, but we are called to be thinkers upon the old gospel, that we may know and understand its principles and its bearings and become confirmed in the belief of it. We need to think over the Word till we are thoroughly permeated with it. The silk of certain insects takes its color from the leaves on which they feed, and a Christian's life will always take its color from that which his soul feeds upon. Oh, to live upon the Word of God, even upon the deep things of God, for so shall we be rooted and grounded in the faith and shall take fast hold of eternal wisdom.

An established Christian is one who not only knows the doctrine, but who also knows the authority for it, having looked around it and pondered it in his heart. By careful meditation he is taught in the truth and is able to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and fear. Nor is he merely a man of the letter, his study in the power of the Holy Spirit has carried him into the essence of the word. He has asked the Spirit of God to make him *acquainted* with divine truth, so that he has not only read *of* it, but he has communed *with* it and now he lives upon it, eats it, drinks it, receives it into the inward parts of his soul and retains it there as a living and incorruptible seed. Now a man who does this year after year is the kind of man who, by God's grace, will take fast hold of instruction and will prove a faithful witness for his Lord.

Add to this also, an *earnest seriousness of character* and you go a long way towards maintaining a fast hold of Christ. We do not mean by this, that we are to dismiss cheerfulness—the Lord give us more of it, for it is as oil to wheels and is a high recommendation of religion to the unconverted. There are some who are a deal too *gloomy* in their religion and seem to think that the grace of God is never displayed by them unless they are sullen and doleful. But at the same time there is a flippancy which is not commendable and a levity which is far from the mind of Christ. Christian life is not child's play. We above all men ought to make our lives sublime and not ridiculous. We are not called into this world to trifle away the hours and kill time in doing nothing, for this life links itself to eternity and that eternity, in spite of all that is said to the contrary, will be one of endless misery or of endless joy. It is, therefore, no small thing to possess an immortal mind and to be responsible before God. Sin is no trifle, pardon is no trifle and condemnation is no trifle. Eternal life is precious beyond all things, but to lie under the wrath of God is dreadful beyond conception. I love to see, especially in young Christians, with regard to the things of God, deep seriousness of purpose and spirit, showing that they feel it to be a weighty thing to be a Christian and that they cannot afford to have their Christianity put under the shadow of suspicion, nor dare they even appear to be mere players upon a stage, for they fear and tremble at His Word.

Now, if all these things are in you and abound, there will grow around them *an experiential verification of the things of God*. I mean that you will not only read of the love of God, but you will feel it from day to day and so be assured of it. You read in the Scriptures of the power of sin and you believe what you read, but to this will be added the confirmatory fact that you feel it in your members, and therefore cannot doubt it. You read of the efficacy of the precious blood of Jesus, but you do more, for you feel its cleansing power upon your heart and its consoling influence over your conscience, and so you are established in the blessed truth. We hardly know anything till we have lived it. You must get truth burnt into you with the hot iron of experience, or you will forget it. I believe that the pains and grief and afflictions of many of God's children have been absolutely necessary to establish them in the faith. And I can only hope that you who are the children of joy may derive as much benefit from your gladness as mourners have found in their sorrows. It might be so, and should be so, but I fear it seldom is. The whole of our life should be a daily testing of the gospel and a continuous verification of the eternal truth thereof. Our life should agree with this Book of life. Just as the book of nature, being written by the same author as the book of revelation shows the same hand and style, so the book of the new creation within us, being inscribed by the same Spirit who has written these Scriptures, will display the same style and manner. And we shall thus be growingly assured of the things which are verily revealed to us by God. Go on, dear friends, and may the Lord grant that whatever your experience may be, whether it shall abound in

bitterness or in sweetness, the testimony of God may be confirmed in you and your grip of it may be intensified by every year's experience.

I must add one other word. I believe that in the mode of taking fast hold upon the gospel, *practical Christianity* has a great influence. I refer especially to practical usefulness. Some members enter the church and never do a hand's turn. We have the distinguished privilege of seeing them sit in their pews and that is all we know about them. We cannot bring them under church censure, for they are punctual in religious observances, but they are barren limbs. Give me the young man who, when he joins the church, says, "I shall take a little time to study the gospel till I know more of it by the teaching of God's Spirit." And then, having done so, says, "I have not learned this for myself. There is something for me to do in connection with the church of God and I am determined to find out what it is and to do it." You see such a young believer going to the Sunday school, or you find him beginning to speak in a cottage, or becoming a visitor and seeking to speak personally to individuals about their souls. If he is a man of the right kind, his work will be another holdfast to his mind. Look at him, how he keeps to the gospel, how he clings to the old, old truth. He is not the man to run after new theories and modern doubts, for he is helped to keep right by his practical connection with spiritual disease and its remedy. Go into the back slums of London and see if you will doubt the doctrine of human depravity. Oh no, it is your ladies and gentlemen that wear lavender kid gloves who doubt that doctrine. Try to rescue a harlot from her sin and if you are enabled to lead her to Jesus, you cannot doubt the power of the precious blood of Jesus to cleanse the heart. Not those who battle with vice, but those who practice it themselves, are the ones who quibble at the doctrine of the atonement. Those who are busy plucking brands out of the fire are little given to speculation, but are firm abiders in the gospel. I think there are few exceptions to the rule that the "advanced thought" gentlemen are not engaged in practical work for the salvation of souls. They are grand talkers, but very poor workers. I am not hypercritical when I say that if you will mention a "modern thought" professor, it will generally turn out that he is not worth his salt as to practical usefulness—not he—he has the parrot faculty of pulling things to pieces, but what positive work has he ever done? He may be a distinguished dignitary or a noble scholar, but as to actually grappling with the hearts and consciences of men, and entering into the dark and troublous experience of tempted souls, he is quite at sea, for he knows nothing about it. He would talk after another fashion if his hands had ever been laid to hard work among sinful men and afflicted consciences. I tell you, sirs, that to argue with a poor distressed conscience and to try to bring it to peace in Christ soon lets you know the truth of the gospel. To stand by a dying bed and hear the holy triumph of even the most illiterate of the children of God, or what is equally efficacious, to watch the last sad hours of an impenitent sinner dying without hope, will make you know that there is a world to come, joyful or terrible as the case may be, and you will also learn that sin is a great evil and that the atonement is a great reality. Young convert, if you want to be one of the firm holders of the gospel, you must get to work as well as to study, for this by the overruling power of the Holy Spirit, will strengthen you in the faith of God's elect. Thus I have brought forward the method, may it prove to be instructive.

II. Very briefly, I want now to show THE DIFFICULTIES of taking fast hold of instruction. And every difficulty I mention will tend to show all the more clearly, the necessity of it.

The first difficulty is that *this is the age of questioning*. Everybody questions now. Our friends over in Germany have pushed the questioning business to the furthest point and in their thorough way they have produced its legitimate fruit in cold-blooded attempts to murder a venerable monarch. Professed ministers of the gospel have taught the German mind to doubt everything, and now the basis of society is shaken, and law and order are undermined. What could they expect otherwise? He who does not fear God is not likely to honor the king. When men give up their Bibles, they will care but little for human laws. We have plenty of the same evil in England, and certain clergymen and dissenting divines are spreading it with hideous industry. Young gentlemen, whose whiskers have not yet developed, are authoritatively deciding that nothing can be decided, and dogmatically denouncing all dogmas. We meet them every day and we notice that in proportion to their ignorance is their confidence in sneering at every holy thing. According to them, nobody is sincere, nothing is sacred. These great men, who would never have been heard of if they had not been heretical, know better by far than God Himself. As for apostles and prophets, they are just nothing at all to these infallibles. Their own "thought" is more precious than inspiration itself. This conceited skepticism is in the air. It seems to be everywhere and you cannot help encountering it, therefore let us be the more earnest to hold fast the faith.

Worse than this, *this is an age of worldliness*. Everybody wants to be rich and nobody is rich now at the point at which his forefathers were content to stop. Our good old deacons and respected church members were content with very moderate incomes. They were satisfied and happy with thrift and prudence and would have been deeply grieved with the extravagance which is seen on all sides at this time. They not only considered their shops and their fields, but they planned to have time to look after the Sunday schools in which they were proud to serve and the prayer meetings which they delighted to attend. But, dear me, prayer meetings, lectures, sermons, Sunday schools, these are all despised now! If a man can make an extra guinea or two, by putting himself where they are out of the question, he jumps at the chance. We must be rich, we must cut a dash, we must spend more than our neighbors, and for this the work of the church may go to the dogs. Oh for a few simple, earnest Christians who will judge their Lord and His cause to be worth some consideration, and will lay themselves out to serve His church. When worldliness is so predominant, it becomes so much the harder to take fast hold of eternal things. One needs to hear the word, "Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you," for unless we do hear it, we shall be tempted to take fast hold on the world, and let the things of eternity slip by us.

Then, besides, there is and always has been *a great desire for novelty*. We are all the subjects of it. We all like something fresh. But there are some who are sick of the changeable disease. You see them zealots for a creed today, but all of a sudden you find them deeply immersed in the opposite teaching. Ah, now they have discovered something very wonderful, just as the idiot who saw the rainbow, and believed that there was a pot of gold at the end of it, ran for miles to seize a glittering sapphire and grasped a piece of glass bottle, so do they forever pursue and never attain. We have a few of these gentlemen in most of our churches, but you will find them nowhere long. Another inventor starts a new system and away they go, pining always to be the first disciples of each new prophet. May God save us from the Athenian spirit, which forever hungers for something new.

Another difficulty, and the worst of all, is *the corruption of our own hearts*. "Take fast hold of instruction," says the text. "Why," I hear a brother say, "my dear sir, sometimes it is as much as I can do to take hold of it at all. I have to question whether I have been converted. I go down into such depths of despondency, that unless the truth holds me, I shall never hold it." Well, but I hope this is all a means of helping you to hold it all the more firmly. You now see that salvation must be by grace from first to last. By this very process you will be compelled to hold the doctrines of grace the more intensely, because you are made to see how utterly unable you are, in and of yourself, to think a good thought, much less to remain steadfast in the whole truth of Christ.

And then there is *Satan*, too. How busy he is in trying to undermine the fundamentals of the faith! Has he not suggested to some of us all kind of doubts? Yes. I said to a man one day, who had uttered some blasphemy in my presence against a certain truth, "You think you stagger me! My dear man, I have had more doubts pass through my thoughts than you could tell me, or 50 like you." The doubts which the devil insinuates into the minds of the people of God are at times quite as horrible as any which a Voltaire or a Tom Paine was ever able to invent. And yet by God's grace, we have not given up the gospel, nor shall we though heaven and earth shall pass away. Because we are one with Christ we shall live in the truth of Christ, for He will keep and preserve us even to the end.

III. Thirdly, let us consider THE BENEFITS of taking fast hold. I wish I had an hour in which to dilate upon the benefit of so doing, but I must briefly say that it *gives stability* to the Christian character to have a firm grip of the gospel. Men who take fast hold are the backbone of a church. All through the dark reign of moderates in Scotland, who kept up the testimony for truth? Why, those solid Christians who were known as, "the men," who held the faith and walked with God in the power of it. These were men much in prayer and much in meditation, who lived on when all sound teaching had left the pulpits, because their souls were sustained by secret communion with God on the hillside. When the time came for pure truth to revive in Scotland, these men came to the front and were honored as the men who had kept the flame alive in the land. What was it that delivered our country in still earlier times, from being altogether under the hoof of Rome? When prelates forsook Christ and preachers by the hundreds in Mary's day turned from Protestantism to Popery, the true faith lived on in the hearts of poor men and women, weavers and cobblers, who believed what they did believe, and could not deny the truth. Everybody in the parish knew that they were "stubborn heretics," who could not be frightened or argued down. They knew. They were sure. They were confident and therefore they spoke. It did not matter to

them that they were in a minority, for they knew that a minority of one on God's side is a majority. "I Athanasius, against the world," said that grand old confessor, when they told him everybody had gone over to Arianism, and that nobody believed in the deity of Christ. "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved. I bear up the pillars of it," said one of old. And happy is that man to whom such an office is given.

A firm grip of the gospel will give you *strength for service*. The man who can "hold the fort" at one time is the very man who can capture a fort at another time. He who can stand well can march well. The hand of the church is made of the same material as its backbone. It is of no use sending poor hesitating professors into the field of holy labor. If you hardly know what you believe, how can you teach other people? But when the truth is written upon your very soul and engraved as with the point of a diamond upon your heart, you will speak with confidence and there will be a power about your utterances which none shall be able to withstand or deny. For the sake, then, of your spiritual strength, I press the exhortation of the text, "Take fast hold of instruction."

And this, too, will bring you *joy*. The outskirts of our Jerusalem are dreary; her glory lies within. Where shines the brightest light? It is in the holy of holies, in the innermost shrine. The skin and husks of religion are poor things, but the juice, the life, the vital power of religion—therein lies the sweetness. You must not be satisfied with the "name to live"—it will never comfort you—it will even distress you. The life of Christ mightily developed in you must be the joy of your heart. Multitudes of Christian professors get next to nothing out of Christianity. How can they? They hold their religion as some rich farmers hold "off-hand farms." Nobody ever makes anything out of off-hand farms. The man who makes farming pay, lives on the spot and gives his whole time and energy to it. So is it in the things of God. If you make your minister your bailiff in religion, you will get nothing out of it. You must live in it and upon it and then you will prosper. I want you to say, "If there is anything in godliness I am going to know it. If prayer has power I am going to pray. If there is such a thing as communion with God I will enjoy it. If there is such a thing as likeness to Christ I will obtain it. Godliness shall not be an addition to my life, but it shall be my life itself." Ah, brethren, you are the man of the shining countenance, you are the man of the sparkling eyes. You drink deep and you find that the deeper you drink the sweeter the draught becomes.

Lastly, with regard to this summary of benefits—persons of this kind are *the very glory of the church*, they are the persons in whom true religion displays its brightest beams. They may be humble cottagers, or obscure members of a large church who are scarcely known. But those who live with them, those who are at all acquainted with them, say of them, "These men and women are a credit to the church and an honor to the name of Christianity." Not your frothy talkers, not your flimsy professors, but your deep taught, grace-instructed men and women, these are they who are the beauty of the church and the glory of Christ. I would to God we had many more. I look around and see that the cause does not prosper as I would wish throughout the land. And then I remember in one spot an earnest village preacher, in another a holy laborious deacon, in a third a gracious woman, zealous in every good work, and I am comforted. Thank God there is life in the old church yet. There is hope for her yet, because of her fast-holding people. If I study the statistics of the churches, I have to say, "What is the good of these figures? Probably a church of two hundred members might be cut down to twenty earnest effectives." For my part, I would sooner stand on this platform with twelve holy men and women to back me up, than with twelve thousand mere pretenders to religion such as can be found in crowds anywhere. No, it is the fast grip of faith; it is vital godliness which makes a man to be a real power in the church.

IV. Now, lastly, I have to mention THE ARGUMENTS of the text, which are three. All through the sermon I have been using argument; therefore I shall be the briefer and draw to a close.

The first argument is, take fast hold of true religion, because it is your best friend. Read the text—"Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go." You cannot find your way to heaven without this guide, therefore do not suffer it to leave you. Do as Moses did, who when his father-in-law, Hobab, was with him, would not suffer him to depart, "for," he said, "you shall be to us instead of eyes, for you know where to encamp in the wilderness." As Moses kept Hobab, so you keep the faith, for you cannot find your road except by holding the true gospel with a true heart. What a sweet companion the gospel is! How often it has cheered you! How easy has the road become while you have been in communion with it. Do what the disciples at Emmaus did when Jesus talked with them—they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us." Do not let Him go. You will be a lonely pilgrim if you do. No, if you could be led by

an angel, but must lose the presence of your God, you would be wise to cry out against such an evil, and like Moses, plead—"If Your Spirit go not with us, carry us not up hence."

The next argument is that true godliness should be held fast, for it is *your treasure*. "Keep it," says our text. It is your best inheritance at the present moment, and it is to be your eternal inheritance—keep it, then. Let everything else go, but do not part with a particle of truth. The slightest fragment of truth is more valuable than a diamond. Hold it then, with all firmness. You are so much the richer by every truth you know. You will be so much the poorer by every truth you forget. Hold it then and hide it in your heart. A certain king, who had a rare diamond, sent it to a foreign court, entrusting it to a very faithful servant. This servant was attacked however, on the road by a band of robbers, and as they could not find the diamond, they drew their swords and killed him. He was found dead, but his master exclaimed, "He has not lost the diamond, I am sure!" He judged rightly, for the trusty servant had swallowed the gem and so preserved it with his life. We also, should thus place the truth in our inward parts, and then we shall never be deprived of it. A priest took a Testament from an Irish boy. "But," cried the boy, "you cannot take away those six chapters of Matthew that I learned by heart." They may take away our books, but they cannot take away what we have fed upon and made our own. "His flesh is meat indeed. His blood is drink indeed," for when we have fed upon Him, our Lord Jesus remains in us the hope of glory. Hold fast the truth, O believers in Jesus, for it is your treasure.

Lastly, *it is your "life."* Mr. Arnot, in His very beautiful book upon the Proverbs, tells a story to illustrate this text. He says that in the Southern seas an American vessel was attacked by a wounded whale. The huge monster ran out for the length of a mile from the ship, and then turned round, and with the whole force of its acquired speed struck the ship and made it leak at every timber, so as to begin to go down. The sailors got out all their boats, filled them as quickly as they could with the necessities of life and began to pull away from the ship. Just then two strong men were seen leaping into the water, which swam to the vessel, scrambled on board, disappeared for a moment and then came up, bringing something in their hands. Just as they sprang into the sea down went the vessel, and they were carried round in the vortex, but they were observed to be both of them swimming, not as if struggling to get away, but as if looking for something, which at last they both seized and carried to the boats. What was this treasure? What article could be so valued as to lead them to risk their lives? It was the ship's compass which had been left behind, without which they could not have found their way out of those lonely southern seas into the high road of commerce. That compass was life to them and the gospel of the living God is the same to us. You and I must venture all for the gospel. This infallible Word of God must be guarded to the death. Men may tell us what they please, and say what they will, but we will risk everything sooner than give up those eternal principles by which we have been saved. The Lord give all of us His abundant grace that we may take fast hold of divine instruction. Amen.

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